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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000882

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [YM](#) [DOMESTIC](#) [POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: MARIB: ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL

REF: SANAA 857

Classified By: Ambassador E.J. Hull for reasons 1.5 b. and d.

1.(U) Summary: As part of a USG initiative to encourage development and security in the underdeveloped governorates of Yemen, Ambassador traveled to Marib to initiate USG assistance in agriculture, to study cultural preservation and to review progress on the U.S. efforts to train and equip the Marib Presidential hospital. The visit took place in the final days of the parliamentary election campaign. According to Marib Governor Nassi, the Islah party could win two out of the three seats of the Marib district. End Summary

12. (U) On April 20 and 21 Ambassador led a delegation to visit Marib, a conservative and tribal-dominated eastern governorate to sign an implementing agreement on agricultural projects with the Governor of Marib, visit the hospital to which the USG is providing 5.3 million dollars of equipment and training assistance, and engage in discussions regarding the future location of a USG-funded museum.

USG Assistance to Marib

13. (U) Marib Governor Abdulla Nassi welcomed Ambassador and signed the proposal initiating the first phase of agricultural assistance for irrigation, rural women's development, livestock management, and seed multiplication. The agreement also allows for the USG to bring electricity to an agricultural research center that will serve the governorates of Al-Jowf and Shabwa to develop shade and green houses. Research will be conducted with the aim of establishing a second growing season comprised of cash crops for Marib and to determine ways to fight prevalent plant diseases. Governor Nassi asked for additional assistance in bringing local agricultural products to market, canning and preserving, irrigation, and help in establishing the mining industry of Marib.

14. (U) Ambassador stressed that the U.S. is currently providing nearly USD 8 million in assistance for Marib residents. At the Presidential Hospital, the Ambassador visited with 15 of the 161 students who were all selected from the Marib governorate and funded by the USG to study at institutes throughout Yemen and return to staff the hospital. The building itself is paid for by ROYG oil revenue, and the USG is providing 5.3 million dollars for training and equipping the hospital. Note: Marib governorate is also where Yemen-Hunt has its main drilling facilities. End Note.

15. (U) In an effort to encourage tourism in Marib, the ancient home of the Sabaen kingdom and the Queen of Sheba, the USG is studying a proposal to build a museum to house antiquities. The Ambassador visited the storage facility where many of the ancient artifacts are stored haphazardly on the governor's compound, and initiated discussion on the location of the museum. (Comment: Rumors that foreign archeologists, including Americans, are taking artifacts out of Marib is a continuing source of tension. End Comment.)

Islah Permeates Marib

16. (U) At a dinner hosted by the Ambassador for project stakeholders, Governor Nassi told Ambassador that he believed Islah would gain one seat in the upcoming parliamentary elections on April 27, giving Islah two out of the three districts in Marib. Describing himself as a soccer referee who happens to favor one side, the Governor explained that Islah is extremely active in the local community, focusing their campaign on the economy and social services. Islah's popularity was clearly visible: several rock formations in the shape of the Islah party sun symbol lined the road to Sanaa, on the return the delegation passed a large, loud convoy supporting Islah, and banners were hung on houses, trucks, and businesses. Nassi described the present electoral system as a modern system overlaying traditional tribal organization and has called on tribal custom to keep violence down. But, Nassi added, tribal allegiances do not necessarily follow party lines, and many tribes were offering candidates in both Islah and GPC parties for the elections.

17. (U) At a local primary girls' school, the Ambassador

toured classrooms that had just received 100 of the 4,000 school desks provided by the USG to Marib. Local officials told the Ambassador that some of the schools that had received desks had had no place for the children to sit. At the girls' school, Islah party literature was visible on the outer walls, and above the entrance a banner promised that Islah would provide a better future and eliminate women's suffering. The curriculum appeared overly religious to members of the national press who commented negatively on the strong religious overtones in the teaching methods and signs on the walls.

18. (U) Fanda Al-Amri, chairperson of the Union of Women and Child Development Association and principal of the girls' school where the delegation visited, gave Pol/Econoff a range of requests for the women of Marib. Explaining that the short growing season makes it difficult for vegetables to be consumed year-round, she requested assistance in providing local women with knowledge on how to can and preserve food. Turning to education, she said that there is one girls' secondary school serving the whole district of Marib and often parents do not want the daughters to travel the long distance necessary to attend. At the same school, she continued, there are no chemistry and physics teachers, which excludes the girls from taking national qualifying exam should they wish to further their education.

19. (C) Comment: The political race in Marib will be determined by who can demonstrate that his party can provide more services and reforms to serve the local population. An education leader, prominent in local women's organizations, Al-Amri represents Islah's popularity in Marib. She voiced frustrations with that Ministry of Education's inability to provide basic education to the girls of Marib, but also directly appealed for USG assistance in that area. She proves that despite anti-US rhetoric by some factions of Islah, her reason for political alignment is at least in part based on who she believes will help the girls of Marib.

HULL